

Course Syllabus – HT6125
American Presbyterianism
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, MS
2026 Spring

Professor: David T. Irving, Ph.D. (dirving@rts.edu)

Teaching Assistant: TBA

Class Meetings: Tuesdays, 9-11am

Office Hours: by appointment

I. Course Description

A survey of the history of American Presbyterianism from its roots in the Calvinistic reformed tradition to the present. The course focusses on key historical events and controversies that shaped Presbyterian denominations, major leaders who influenced Presbyterian theology and its prominent institutions, movements that reflected Presbyterian leadership of American religions, and the reciprocal relation between Presbyterianism and American culture.

II. Course Objectives (taken from Dr. Sean M. Lucas)

1. The student will be *introduced* to the main outlines of Presbyterian history in America, noting major figures, events, controversies, and outcomes.
2. Through the lectures, the student will be *exposed* to the cultural and political contexts of Presbyterian thought and *develop* a greater critical appreciation for the Presbyterian tradition.
3. Through the reading and discussions, the student will be *oriented* to key figures, beliefs, practices, and stories in the life of the Presbyterian church and will *consider* how they relate to contemporary Christian life and ministry.
4. Through the critical book review essay, the student will *engage* in critical dialogue with one particularly significant theologian or theological event in Presbyterian history.
5. Through the final paper, the student will have the opportunity to *explore* a particular Presbyterian theologian or theological issue and so grow in critical appreciation for Presbyterian history and identity.

III. Attendance

1. Students are expected to attend all class meetings.
2. Excused absences may be granted for medical reasons or other extenuating circumstances. Please submit excuse requests to the professor at least one week in advance of the anticipated absence.
3. Each unexcused absence after the first one will result in the reduction of your final grade by one full letter (i.e., four unexcused absences result in a three-letter reduction).

IV. Technology use, AI, and Plagiarism

1. Students may not use computers, phones, or recording devices in class. Students may request consideration for an exception in special cases.
2. Use of AI must conform to the RTS AI policy provided in the student handbook.
3. Plagiarism is forbidden and will be dealt with in accordance with the RTS policy provided in the student handbook.

V. Required Reading

Books

The Bible (I will typically use the ESV)

The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms As Adopted By the Presbyterian Church in America with Proof Texts. Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications, 2007.

The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History. Edited by Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A. Loetscher, Charles A. Anderson. Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.

Feldmeth, Nathan P., S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J Stewart. *Reformed and Evangelical Across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2022.

Longfield, Bradley J. *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Lucas, Sean Michael. *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing 2015.

Other works (available on Canvas and/or free online and/or library reserve)

Forthcoming

VI. Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class participation (10%). Pay careful attention in lectures. When appropriate, offer thoughtful questions and comments that demonstrate engagement with the reading and lectures.
2. Reading (25%). Complete all reading assignments prior to class. Each week, students will check “yes” or “no” to the question, “Did you complete the reading assignments for this class period?”

3. Test on dates of major figures and events (15%). Give the date and a one sentence summary for a list of significant people and events in American Presbyterianism. The list will be provided in advance of the test.
4. Book review (20%). In three (3) pages (Times New Roman; size 12; double spaced; citations in parentheses i.e. (Smith, 34); your name and date top right of first page; paper title left justified on first page; page numbers bottom center) review one book from .
5. Paper (30%). Write a 12-15 page paper (Times New Roman; size 12; double spaced; *Chicago Manual of Style* footnotes and bibliography; your name and date at the top right of first page; paper title left justified on first page; page numbers bottom center) on some aspect of American Presbyterianism. The first page (roughly) should introduce the topic and clearly state the thesis. Engage at least five (5) different sources, not including assigned course reading. The last page (roughly) should summarize your argument and clearly state your conclusion. Paper topics must be approved by the professor no later than March 3.
6. Mississippi Presbyterian History Tour. The class will tour some of the oldest Presbyterian-related sites in Mississippi, making connections between observations made about Presbyterianism nationally and how those events, trends, and movements unfolded in Mississippi. ***This tour is an all-day event (~8:00am-5:00pm)***

VII. Schedule

Jan 27	Lecture: Introduction and the Arrival of Presbyterianism to America Reading: none
Feb 3	Lecture: Early Presbyterian mission, Church courts, and the Adopting Act Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (ix-98); <i>Presbyterian Enterprise</i> (7-32)
Feb 10	Lecture: The Great Awakening and the Old Side/New Side division Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (81-113); Longfield (ix-24); <i>Presbyterian Enterprise</i> (33-61)
Feb 17	Lecture: Presbyterianism in the Revolution and early Republic Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (114-129); Longfield (25-51); <i>Presbyterian Enterprise</i> (62-95)
Feb 24	Lecture: The Plan of Union and missionary expansion Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (130-144); <i>Presbyterian Enterprise</i> (95-145)
Mar 3	Lecture: Presbyterians Divided: the Old School/New School split Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (145-161); Longfield (53-90); <i>Presbyterian Enterprise</i> (146-171)
Mar 10	Reading Week

Mar 17 Lecture: Presbyterianism before, during, and after the Civil War
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (162-196); Longfield (91-115); *Presbyterian Enterprise* (199-243)

Mar 24 Lecture: Evolution, and Mission in the late 19th century
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (197-211); Longfield (117-147); *Presbyterian Enterprise* (244-267)

Mar 31 Lecture: Fundamentalism and Modernism
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (212-262); Longfield (149-174); Lucas (TBD); *Presbyterian Enterprise* (268-292)

Apr 7 Lecture: Northern Division, World War, Southern Tension
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (263-282); Longfield (149-174); Lucas (TBD); *Presbyterian Enterprise* (293-320)

Apr 14 Lecture: American Presbyterianism in the Civil Rights Era
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (283-303); Longfield (175-195); Lucas (TBD)

Apr 21 Lecture: The Founding of the PCA to the Present
Reading: Feldmeth et. al. (304-329); Longfield (195-203); Lucas (TBD)

Apr 28 Lecture: ***Mississippi Presbyterian History Tour***
Reading: Lucas (TBD)

VIII. Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: HT6125 American Presbyterianism

Professor: David T. Irving

Campus: Jackson, MS

Date: Spring 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes		Rubric	Mini- Justification
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Students will learn to articulate their understanding of historical events and defend interpretations of those events through in-class participation. They will do similarly in the writing assignments.	STRONG	Students are required to participate in discussions and write papers.
Scripture	Students will learn the biblical justification for studying church history and learn to evaluate historical ideas, trends, and figures by the Scripture.	MODERATE	Students will examine movements and ideas in American Presbyterianism with Scripture.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and debates over its articulation and application.	STRONG	Students will study the theological debates that took place among American Presbyterians.
Sanctification	Students will observe historically significant Christians and learn from their godly examples while also being warned of their failures and sins.	STRONG	Lectures and assignments engage piety and doctrine of numerous historical figures.
Worldview	Observe how Christians in the past worked out the implications of Reformed theology. This will assist students in doing the same.	STRONG	Students will engage worldview questions throughout the history of American Presbyterianism.
Winsomely Reformed	Some of the major turning points in American Presbyterianism were debates between Reformed Christians seeking to understand and implement their convictions. This course will assist students in engaging those debates charitably.	STRONG	Students will weigh different interpretations and applications of Reformed theology throughout the history of American Presbyterianism.
Pastoral Ministry	Students will learn from historically significant pastors. Students will also develop a familiarity with the historical context of their ministries, which will assist them to knowledgably serve their flocks today.	STRONG	Students will be introduced to model pastors in the Reformed tradition, and also learn from their failures.